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Guest Editorial : Healing and Transformation in Global Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity

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Guest Editorial

Healing and Transformation in Global Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity

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Around the world, Christian individuals and churches preach and practice healing and transformation, and regard them as a natural part of their religious life. Especially in what is often referred to as Pentecostal or Charismatic Christianity, they are seen as defining phenomena and therefore widely discussed in research. The aim of this special issue is to incorporate this wider discussion into missiological circles, the *Mission Studies* journal and the International Association for Mission Studies community.

Most of the articles in this special issue were presented during a study group at the IAMS General Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, in August 2016. During the conference a name-change of the study group was discussed that would better reflect the interests of the current study-group members and match the rapid growth of research on Pentecostal/Charismatic forms of Christianity. The group noted that there was no other study group working specifically within this research area, while at the same time “Healing/Pneumatology,” the old name of the group, seemed like an obscure name. A name-change would open up the group for all IAMS members interested in questions related to a variety of Pentecostal/Charismatic expressions in Global Christianity, not just “healing” and “spirits.” At the same time the change is firmly in line with the history of the study group. The study group suggested a new name: “Pentecostal/Charismatic Expressions in Global Christianity,” which was later confirmed by the IAMS executive committee in early 2017.

The IAMS website explains the definition and the task of this new group as follows:

The IAMS study-group *Pentecostal/Charismatic Expressions in Global Christianity* is concerned with a wide variety of subjects that in different ways relate to the current charismatization of Global Christianity. This global trend has been going on for quite some time especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and charismatic forms of worship and piety (and to some extent doctrine) today are widespread across Christian denominations. Research on this phenomenon is booming as well, not least in anthropology and sociology. In theology the interest has been more moderate. However, it is the understanding of the study group that many of the relevant questions in Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity cannot be understood unless theology – both in the strict sense of doctrine and in a wider sense of Christian faith – is taken into account. In this area the IAMS study-group seeks to be a relevant missiological forum to discuss the phenomenon and to contribute with theological perspectives.¹

This description defines well the contributions in this special issue.

Professor Mark J. Cartledge defines Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity and their expressions in his new book² as follows: “I regard charismatic dimensions to Christianity as fundamentally linked to the person and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. This dimension has often been expressed in dramatic experiences of encounter with God (e.g. conversion, expressions of holiness and Spirit baptism) or specific gifts and ministries (e.g. glossolalia, prophecy and healing) and has led to a renewal of worshipping practices, congregational life and missionary impulses” (Cartledge 2017:2). Cartledge’s definition addresses all the articles in this special issue and it has also given a structure to it. The first article, written by Robert Sears, analyzes dreams as dramatic experiences connected to conversion to Christianity in Nepal. The following three articles deal with healing ministries, transformation and belonging. Alison Fitchett Climenhaga studies how faith healing and deliverance relates to medical treatment in local Catholics’ discourse surrounding charismatic healing in western Uganda. Hans Olsson continues the discussion of healing and deliverance when he underlines the ways in which Zanzibar origins, Roman Catholic affiliation, and habits of consulting traditional healers are re-narrated and made meaningful in the Pentecostal context on the Swahili coast of Tanzania. Lotta Gammelín introduces a nice new term

1 <http://missionstudies.org/index.php/study-groups/pentecostal-charismatic-expressions-global-christianity/>.

2 See Auli Vähäkangas’ review of Cartledge’s book in this issue.

“health-seeking nomads” when she studies healing and belonging in Southern Tanzania. According to Gammelín, health-seeking nomads are people who move between alternative spaces of healing-biomedical health care, traditional and neo-traditional healers, and a multitude of churches in order to find healing and relief for their afflictions. And finally, Martina Prosén concludes this selection of papers in her analyses of worship songs and acts of singing as a renewal practice in a Kenyan Pentecostal context.

All five contributors of this issue are young scholars of global Christianity. Robert Sears and Hans Olsson have already defended their PhD theses and Martina Prosén, Alison Fitchett Climenhaga and Lotta Gammelín are finalizing their own research. The articles in this issue are connected with their PhD studies but present something additional. Four of the articles study Charismatic expressions in the African context and one in Asia. All five have done extensive ethnographic field work for the data used in these articles. The high-quality field work and data they have produced is extremely valuable and interesting for *Mission Studies* readers. Religious contexts of the analyzed Charismatic expressions vary from Roman Catholic via Pentecostal to African Instituted Christianity. All five contributors of this issue have done their studies in a context foreign to their own. Two of the authors are Americans and three come from the Nordic countries. They all represent western universities (Fuller, Notre Dame, Lund) in which there exists strong research on global expressions of Christianity. In the study group in Seoul we also had presenters who had studied their own context and who came from non-western universities but for various reasons they could not contribute to this issue.